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H Y P E R - C R I T I C I S M

O N

MISS SEWARD's LOUISA.

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[Price One Shilling.]

1609/1331.



HYPER-CRITICISM  
ON  
Miss SEWARD'S LOUISA,  
INCLUDING  
OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE  
NATURE AND PRIVILEGES  
OF  
POETIC LANGUAGE.

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## H Y P E R - C R I T I C I S M

O N

### Miss S E W A R D ' s   L O U I S A.

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WHEN those who assume the office of dictators to the public taste reason plausibly upon false principles, it is right that we endeavour to preserve the unripened judgement of young readers from their misleading sophistry. With this view I examine, in the eye of the public, the reasons on which the gentleman (whose department in the Monthly Review is to consider the poetic publications) grounds his opinion, that Miss Seward's Louisa approaches not to that degree of excellence which might have been expected from her talents; while the world in general consider that poem as the most ingenious and interesting among her compositions. He accuses her of accumulating through its pages glaring metaphors,

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and of aiming to dazzle by superfluity of ornament; that she is apt to forget the character which she assumes. However, he confines these censures to the dramatic passages, where the characters are introduced as actually speaking.

Not having been struck with any objection of this kind on a repeated perusal of Louisa, nor having heard it hinted by any of the fine writers and acknowledged judges of poetic composition, with whom I have frequently conversed about that work, the censure surprised me extremely; and I resumed the poem, to re-examine it with impartial attention. Through the first epistle no character is represented as actually speaking. Louisa, however deeply afflicted, not under the *first* impression of her sorrows, sooths them, as she professes to do, by giving the reins to her imagination. Mr. Mason, in his Ode to a Friend, beautifully says, "that Fancy is the friend of Affliction, and that she rules her song."

The first person introduced as speaking is Emira; who, on being rescued by Eugenio from the hands of ruffians, only says, "I am indebted  
" for more than my life to thy generous assistance."

Eugenio



Eugenio replies, " that his arm had deserved to  
 " wither by palsies, had it shunned the duty of  
 " the brave, and refused to assist her." But, ob-  
 serving that their situation was dangerous, offers  
 to conduct her to his father's house, which, with  
 a certain local tenderness, he says, " lifts its head  
 " in the neighbouring valley, the peaceful happy  
 " home of his youth."

The next speech is Emira's to Eugenio's sister.

" Lost to the world, I could be content to live  
 " always within the dear precincts of this sylvan  
 " cell; to renounce every vain, though once ado-  
 " red gratification, which can dissipate the day,  
 " and gild the night; and which employs every  
 " seducing art to flatter beauty, and inspirit plea-  
 " sure."

On being told by Eugenio's sister, that his heart  
 is engaged to a young lady of private rank and  
 fortune, Emira proudly exclaims,

" Can Eugenio be cold and obdurate to my  
 " lavish affection? Do I wear the magic zone of  
 " beauty, am I exalted by rank, and crowned by

“ fortune, that the faint allurements of a villager  
 “ should protect his heart from the influence of  
 “ my charms? It is not possible. Yet, O! thy  
 “ words fix in my bosom the goading stings of  
 “ jealousy!—Matilda, thy charming brother shall  
 “ be mine! This groveling flame will be extin-  
 “ guished at the shrine of Love, by the eclipsing  
 “ power of my attractions.”

The next character represented speaking, is the father of Eugenio. Let us examine whether the author, through any part of that mournful explanation, lies open to the censure of forgetting the character she assumes. Eugenio's short question, “ Louisa! lives she?” can hardly be supposed to incur it.

“ My son, the sweet Louisa lives! I hope in all  
 “ the peace of innocence;—but a painful task is  
 “ mine—to tell thee, O Eugenio! that the dire  
 “ blasts of poverty assail me, and freeze the hopes  
 “ of my life. Belmont has deceived me; he is  
 “ unjust to friendship, and treacherous to confi-  
 “ dence.—Unhappy confidence! which allured  
 “ me to follow a misleading fire, those commercial  
 “ visions, which were but the meteors of his art-  
 “ ful

" ful brain ! He must have known that they gave  
 " no genuine light, and now they sink in the  
 " whelming waves of ruin. Great and numberless  
 " are the evils which surround me in my failing  
 " age ;—the pangs of seeing thy sweet sisters, born  
 " to fairest expectations, torn from ease and afflu-  
 " ence, and exposed to all the snares which sur-  
 " round indigent beauty ; to evils, whose bare ap-  
 " prehension tear a *father's* bosom, and blend his  
 " cares with agony.—Thy dearer mother !” Here  
 he paused, turned his head, and wept. At length  
 resuming,

“ These woes that hover over our house, ere  
 “ their dread weight descends to crush us, thou,  
 “ O my dear son ! *thou* canst avert—but, alas ! at  
 “ what a price !—My persuasions shall not urge,  
 “ neither shall my prayers intice thee.

“ Two hours ere thy return, Emira found thy  
 “ sisters drowned in tears ; and learnt from their  
 “ trembling lips the dire event that spreads the  
 “ dark cloud of consternation so wide over my  
 “ roof, which yesterday beheld the fair and favo-  
 “ rite asylum of domestic comfort.

“ We

" We know that Fortune has showered her  
 " treasures on Emira with an unstinting hand.—  
 " Eugenio ! she stands ready to replace thy father's  
 " comforts on a lasting basis ; to preserve the  
 " numbers whose hopes find a grave in his destruc-  
 " tion ; and, while her wealth dispels this dark  
 " cloud, to rekindle in eyes, which are most dear  
 " to him, the light of joy !—But at the price—  
 " Great God !—thy father, Eugenio, shrinks from  
 " the proposal !—it is overwhelmed in his tears.  
 " Sharp distress compels him to name the condi-  
 " tion ;—thy hand to her—given at the altar !—  
 " Alas ! I read the impossibility in the grief, the  
 " horror, which deepen upon thy brow !—O ! for  
 " myself, I would not wish exemption from the  
 " sharpest earthly sorrow, by means which banish  
 " the sweet hopes of virtuous love from the bosom  
 " of my duteous, my affectionate son ; but for the  
 " sake of those who are dearer to me than myself,  
 " perhaps I have dared to hope even *this* sacrifice  
 " from Eugenio.

" Thou knowest, when Peace and Plenty hung  
 " their ripe clusters around our bowers, that the  
 " joys I desired for thee were those of love, not  
 " those of wealth.—But now, O Eugenio ! listen  
 " to

" to me !—Could'st thou bear to see Louisa bend  
 " beneath the weight of those miseries which have  
 " fallen upon us ? Would'st thou transplant the  
 " blossoms of her youth into the destructive soil of  
 " penury ? whose miseries she will not the less se-  
 " verely *feel*, for being too generous to complain  
 " of them. Alas ! when we behold those whom  
 " we love far beyond ourselves, wounded by that  
 " fell demon, broken spirits, and fast wasting  
 " health, will prove, that love, far from extracting,  
 " *barbs* them."

Overcome by the force of a reflection, whose truth he severely experiences, the father of Eugenio pauses again ; but soon recovering that utterance, which anguish had, during a few minutes, arrested, he proceeds,

" It is not much that *my* life, now in its wane,  
 " should sink, shortened by the pains of poverty.  
 " Alas ! I would rather bear their hardest strug-  
 " gles, than wish to quench the hope which, as  
 " yet, has the power to gild thy sorrowing youth ;  
 " that sweet *possibility*, borne on the eventful flight  
 " of days and years, whose chance, if thou re-  
 " mainest single, may remove every bar to thy  
 " union

" union with Louisa—or it might result in time  
 " from thy industry supplying that competence  
 " which would restore the joys of love. I would  
 " myself endure any sorrow rather than strive to  
 " extinguish this light of thy existence;—though  
 " very sharp is the consciousness that the treachery  
 " of Belmor must give the deadliest wound, not  
 " only to my peace, but to my fame. The many,  
 " who must owe their ruin to the destruction of  
 " my hopes, will doubtless believe me a partner  
 " in his fraud. O! the grief of resigning to  
 " blame, so opprobrious, the honest triumph of  
 " a spotless character, even when we dare appeal  
 " to our own intentions from the reproach of blind  
 " injustice, of violent and misguided zeal! Do we  
 " not know how vain it is to stem their torrent?  
 " That when prejudice arraigns, truth pleads to  
 " air; and that her censures daily level with the  
 " base and vile a thousand names, unstained by  
 " the perpetration of any actual crime—but pre-  
 " judice can fix the brand of guilt on those who  
 " have only been imprudent. Yet I would not  
 " ask my child to save me from pains which, de-  
 " livering me up to infamy, seem to rob the very  
 " grave of rest, at the expence of woes, which  
 " may cast a yet deeper gloom over *his* fate, than

" even this bitter reflection must throw over *mine*.  
 " But O, my beloved son ! from anguish, sharper  
 " I trust than ever thou wilt experience, my senses  
 " recoil !—my wife, my dearest wife ! the sweet  
 " companion of my lengthened existence—thy mo-  
 " ther ! for whose peace and health my cares, my  
 " attention, my prayers to heaven, the day and  
 " night have beheld !—Oh ! must I see her pining  
 " in poverty ? While the vital flame feebly  
 " trembles in her bosom, must that delicate and  
 " infirm frame owe its exemption from extreme  
 " want to the cold and scanty donations of cha-  
 " rity ? Can I see this, unable to procure for her  
 " the common comforts which may be obtained  
 " by healthy labour ? Conscious also that my rash  
 " infatuation poured on her gentle head this bitter  
 " phial !—My son ! my son !"

Then sinking on Eugenio's shoulder, heart-smote  
 and pale, he groaned in bitterness of spirit.

This speech is long ; but misery is naturally  
 plaintive, and it was necessary that the unfortunate  
 Ernesto should place every circumstance strongly  
 before the eyes of *him*, to whom he looked for de-  
 liverance.

Has

Has the author forgotten the character she had assumed during this declamation? Has she employed any foreign or absurd ornament? Poetry cannot well take a chaster licence than through this speech. Some degree of elevation must not be dispensed with in poetry, that would deserve its *name*. The very *essence* of poetry is a bold, a glowing, and metaphoric style; rhyme and measure are but its *trappings*. Poetry has been philosophically said to be the language of nature, because it will be found in real life, with people of strong mental powers, that the more they are agitated by passion, the nearer their language will approach to poetry. "Am I on a bed of *roses*?" said the Mexican hero (under the torture of lying on red-hot bars) to his companion, of whose complaints he was ashamed.

But to resume that strict examination of the poem in question, to which the Monthly Reviewer refers his reader.

Eugenio thus replies to the unhappy old man :

" Be comforted, my father ! O, could thy Eugenio live to see thee thus undone, conscious  
" that fortune had given him the power to have  
" saved

“ Saved thee, a self-reproach, so tormenting, must  
 “ distract him ! But, O my Louisa ! Yet pardon  
 “ me ! I go to stem in solitude the conflicting  
 “ tides of my sorrows ! I go to teach my soul the  
 “ arduous task to which she is called ! I go to ob-  
 “ tain by prayer the fortitude to perform it.”

Thus ends the dramatic part of the second epistle. No person is introduced as actually speaking in the third. In the fourth Louisa thus addresses an interesting figure, whom, as she saw approaching to her bower, she had risen to meet.

“ To what chance or generous impulse am I in-  
 “ debted, O venerable stranger ! that thus thou  
 “ visitest this lonely valley, and gazest on me with  
 “ a kindness so interesting and paternal ?”

He answers sighing,

“ Sweet Louisa ! behold in *me* the source of all  
 “ those sorrows, which paled the rose of youth on  
 “ thy cheek ! But thou art generous, and wilt for-  
 “ give the unfortunate Ernesto ! Thou wilt allow  
 “ much to the sad extremes of his situation ; for  
 “ compassion is around thee as a light.”

Louisa,

Louisa, amidst a burst of tender tears, drops involuntarily on one knee; and, while those tears stream on the hands, which, on their first meeting, had infolded *hers*, she says,

“ Heaven ! art thou that being, whom, in *hat-  
pier* days, I had been taught to revere ? on  
“ whose worth, displayed by filial tenderness,  
“ I have meditated so affectionately ? All is  
“ known ! No selfish murmurs, no groans of mine  
“ presume to arraign the mandate of heaven ! Eu-  
“ genio has nobly obeyed its high call. What a  
“ wretch were I, should I reproach the exalted  
“ youth for having deserved the blessing to have  
“ been born thy son ! Some rebel sighs may heave,  
“ some vagrant drops may fall to the memory of  
“ our divided loves ! But the ruthless pangs of sor-  
“ row are passed ; my devoted heart is sad, but  
“ not wretched. Thus obtaining thy generous  
“ love and soothing pity, they shall lull every  
“ fond regret ; nor will I suffer memory to whisper  
“ that once I was more happy.”

Ernesto replies hastily,

“ Honoured Louisa ! fair angelic excellence !  
“ may heaven reward thy virtue ! But time flies  
“ rapidly,

“ rapidly, and delay ill suits the importance of  
 “ my errand. An hapless penitent adjures thee to  
 “ pronounce her pardon, and to receive her dying  
 “ sighs. Come with me, Louisa; my chariot  
 “ waits for us in the valley.”

When Louisa is seated by the side of Ernesto, he, as they travel, describes the appearance and behaviour of Emira in her nuptial hour, and her unamiable conduct as a wife. As this account from the mouth of Ernesto is in general as mere a narrative as any part of the Poem, I shall select the dramatic passages from it, instead of turning the *whole* speech into prose. Ernesto mentions a striking scene very particularly, as he says it is engraven on his memory; that one evening, while he was caressing Emira's infant daughter, Eugenio standing near him, and leaning forward in deep meditation, she entered, dressed for a masquerade, in the wanton habit of the seraglio. Ernesto describes its licentious splendour, and the disapproving looks of his son, who, seizing his wife's hand, says to her :

“ O, is it thus a wedded lady strives to kindle  
 “ the disgraceful fires of the profligate gazer? If

B

“ thy

" thy heart is seared against the claims of an husband,  
 " established by heaven, and revered by  
 " man, yet, O Emira ! listen to me as thy friend !  
 " Preserve the charms of thy bright youth against  
 " an ambush of misfortunes, whose demon-tribe  
 " shall inflict some evils which must reach and  
 " ring the most obdurate bosom. How will that  
 " haughty and aspiring disposition, which de-  
 " mands the incessant homage of mankind ; which  
 " sees those graces, celebrated by flattering  
 " crowds, receive the homage of superior rank,  
 " and of rival beauty ; how will it bear to change  
 " their soft and soothing attention for rude neglect  
 " and studied insolence ; for the familiar nod of  
 " the coxcomb, and the opprobrious celebration  
 " of his lascivious song ? From those high-bred  
 " and fashionable dames, who now excite and  
 " share thy revels, but who, when the livid spot  
 " of detection arises, will studiously shun, and af-  
 " fect to despise thee ; how wilt thou endure from  
 " them the cold insult of the unbending knee, the  
 " vacant stare, and the malicious smile ? Shafts  
 " which only injured *virtue* can repel, and rise  
 " superior to their cruelty."

Emira

Emira hears this remonstrance with sullen brows, flashes of disdain, and impatient struggles to withdraw her hand, which Eugenio had forcibly detained. He then strives by a softer method to awaken her discretion; and, taking the child from his father's arms, puts it into hers, which, half unwillingly, open to receive it, he resumes :

“ Alas ! Emira, shall this lovely infant live to  
 “ feel misery, resulting from the consciousness of  
 “ a mother's dishonour ? Think what painful  
 “ crimson *that* consciousness must pour on the cheek  
 “ of youth ! Or, lost to virtue, shall she plead *thy*  
 “ example for the light manners, the licentious  
 “ action ? Heaven forbid ! O smile, my child, and  
 “ allure that fair bosom to maternal tenderness !  
 “ Let thy opening beauties charm my Emira, ere  
 “ she consume in the baneful fires of criminal plea-  
 “ sure, her matrimonial faith, and the sacred  
 “ claims of a mother ! May she bid thee live to  
 “ mention her without the pause of fear, or the  
 “ blush of shame ! ”

Emira drops a relenting tear on the forehead of her infant, and seems to soften at the appearance of affection, which a sense of duty, and tender

commiseration, impels Eugenio to assme towards the mother of his child ; to whose indiscretion he fears his own coldness may have been necessary. But, on the part of Emira, the transient dawn of virtuous feeling soon disappears ; and those mild beams, which best adorn the eyes of beauty, sink in the clouds of disdainful recollection. Imperiously extending her arms, she gives the infant back to Ernesto, exclaiming,

“ Go, little wretch ! *thou* art not the fruit of  
“ tender and mutual passion ! Then why should I  
“ live for *thee*, whose birth is a disgrace to me ? ”

Then turning to her husband, and bending forward contemptuously, she thus reviles his guardian solicitude.

“ The lover of *Louisa* has a *right* to claim the  
“ stern protection of *Emira*’s reputation, whose  
“ wealth, whose rank, whose youth, and acknow-  
“ ledged beauty, so madly given to thy cold arms,  
“ have been weak to chace the despicable regrets  
“ that load thy heart and freeze every torpid vein.  
“ Even *now* I see those mean regrets sit on thy  
“ pale cheek, and in thy languid eyes ! For *me*,  
“ thou

" thou mayest spare the needless apprehension !  
 " My peace, my fame, abjure Eugenio's protec-  
 " tion. Female pride shall prove an happier  
 " guard to my honour, than was my weak, my  
 " wasted love. Farewell, insensible ! Enjoy thy  
 " sorrows ! Seek, in inglorious shades and sighs,  
 " consolation for the *cruel* decree of fate, which  
 " chained thy *splendid* fortunes to Emira's ! Too  
 " great of soul to repine, she goes to join the  
 " circles she was destined to adorn, till insane pas-  
 " sion, with demon-force, controuled that destiny."

Emira, abandoning herself to criminal pleasures, falls a sacrifice to them, first in her reputation, and afterwards in her health. She is seized with a violent fever. Terrified at her approaching fate, and conscience-struck, she is desirous of obtaining not only her husband's forgiveness, but Louisa's ; and thus addresses Ernesto :

" O, dear Ernesto ! if you have pity, fly to  
 " Louisa ! Should that injured excellence pro-  
 " nounce pardon to this heart, which accuses it-  
 " self so bitterly ; she would cheer my drooping  
 " spirit, hovering on the dark confines of ever-  
 " lasting night."

One short exclamation of Eugenio's upon the sight of Louisa; her whisper of comfort to the dying penitent; and the mournful confession of the latter; I pass over, because the Reviewer quotes them; and, mentioning the pathetic powers of that scene, seems to exempt it from his general censure; which censure I think the discerning reader will now pronounce to be groundless. In taking all the other dramatic parts, which are the only censured ones, out of measure, I have put them to a severe test; nor is one ornament, one figurative expression omitted. If even in *prose* those ornaments do not appear glaring and unnatural, let the necessary elevation of verse be considered, and the author must, in justice, be acquitted of dramatic inconsistency, and of tinsel decoration.

The Reviewer asks, " Does real passion waste its attention on ornament? No; all ornament therefore, which is not obviously spontaneous, must be rejected." Granted; but every metaphor, allusion, and image, that strongly illustrates the situation of the speaker, are spontaneous ornaments. Tropes and figures are oftenest used by people of vivid fancy, under the immediate influence of strong passions. The finest orators and poets

poets pour them forth from the heart which rage and disdain shall sting, which love and grief shall melt. They are the *essence* of poetry; and, had Miss Seward banished them from her late work, it must have sunk to the tameness of measured prose, which is the worst of all bad writing.

Upon the grounds on which this critic censures Louisa, he has a much better right to exclude every impassioned situation from verse. It is very natural for rage, grief, and jealousy, to use tropes and figures; for in fact they almost always *do* use them: but it is unnatural enough to make them speak either in measure or rhyme. The arts and sciences, however, have their privileges; which to destroy, or even abridge, must prove subversive of their empire. Sir Joshua Reynolds's observation, "that wax-work presents a nearer resemblance to "life than the finest painting can effect," proves how respectable and exclusive those privileges, since we despise the *exact* similitude, and admire the more *distant* one,

Miss Seward observes, in her Preface to Louisa, the ornamented precision with which Pope makes Eloisa describe the scenery of Paraclete. She im-

personifies Melancholy, and leads her through the twilight groves, dusky caves, long-sounding isles, and intermingled tombs. She mentions the dark pines, waving over the rocks, and murmuring to the winds; the dying gales that pant upon the branches, and the lakes that curl to the breeze; the wandering waters that shine between the hills, and the grots that echo to their streams. Yet these beautiful and minute descriptions are given under the *first* impressions of tumultuous passions, awakened by the accidental sight of a letter from Abelard, which had made tender mention of her. That fine poem has never been deemed unnatural on account of these descriptions. However superior, as a composition, it may be thought to Louisa, yet, if it is acquitted of false ornament, Miss Seward has a right to demand acquittal on that score for *her* poem,

Shakespear is justly called the Child of Nature, from his wonderful insight into her operations. His characters, when they are strongly agitated, always speak in a glowing and highly figurative style, and seize resemblances with avidity. His absurdities (for with all his matchless genius he had them) have been often pointed out; but none have ever

ever been imputed to him in the portrait he has given us of the bold and bloody Macbeth; yet, when the spirit of that ambitious character is most perturbed with its murderous aspirations, allusion, description, metaphor, and imagery, burst from his lip. Meditating the murder of Duncan, and dreading the future reproaches of his own conscience, he says,

“ Even-handed Justice  
“ Returns the ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
“ To our own lip!”

Recollecting the virtues of the king, he says, that they

“ Will plead, like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against  
“ The deep damnation of his taking off;  
“ And Pity, like a naked new-born babe  
“ Striding the blast, shall blow the horrid deed  
“ In every eye.”

Observe how figuratively Lady Macbeth reproaches her husband for receding from his bloody purpose.

“ Was the hope *drunk* in which you dress'd yourself?  
“ And wakes it now to look so green and pale  
“ At what it did so freely?”

If the reader attends to the language of Macbeth, on entering the chamber of Duncan for the purpose

purpose of the murder, he will perceive how compatible, in a strong imagination, are metaphor and imagery with a situation, than which none can be more agitated, and in whose comparison every situation in *Louisa* is *calm*.

“ Now o'er one half the world  
 “ Nature seems dead ! and wicked dreams abuse  
 “ The curtain'd sleep !—Now witchcraft celebrates  
 “ Pale Hecate's offerings ! and, with *her*, murder,  
 “ Alarum'd by his centinel the wolf,  
 “ Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
 “ And Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design,  
 “ Moves like a ghost !”

Resolving that Banquo should be murdered in the course of the coming night, Macbeth thus invokes, and describes its approach,

“ Come, sealing night !  
 “ Skarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,  
 “ And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,  
 “ Cancel and tear to pieces the great bond  
 “ That keeps me pale ! Light thickens, and the crow  
 “ Makes wing to the rooky wood !”

A cavilling critic, senseless to the fine horror inspired by that description, from the mouth of a man who meditates murder, would, if he had been Shakespear's contemporary, or if he durst attack passages stamp'd with the admiration of many generations,

generations, have declaimed upon the improbability of Macbeth, in such a moment, thinking about crows and tooks. Upon the plan of simplicity, dictated by the Monthly Reviewer, he would not have been allowed to point out the approach of the murky hour in terms more poetical than these—“ ’Tis almost night.” O genius! what a lot is thine, when public censors thus attempt to prescribe thy walks within such cold and narrow limits!

In a softer moment, yet under great trepidation of mind, on hearing of the enemy’s approach to Dunfinane, Macbeth exclaims,

“ My May of life  
“ Is fall’n into the fear, the yellow leaf !”

Chamont, in the Orphan, agitated with jealousy for the honour of Monimia, recollects having been accosted, as he rode through a gloomy lane, by a wrinkled hag, who bade him hasten to save a sister. How minute, under all the quietude of his mind, is his description of the figure, employment, and cloathing of the hielaine! Yet, if the Reviewer’s rule be just, Otway ought to have struck out this passage, which has ever been considered

fidered as the gem of the Tragedy. So also, by the same rule, ought Shakespear to have expunged his fine description of Dover cliff, in King Lear ; of the poor apothecary's shop, in Romeo and Juliet ; and a thousand others, which proceed from characters equally agitated, or under an impression, as immediate, of heavy misfortune. It certainly may be said with some plausibility, that Edgar, shocked at the sight of a still beloved father, who was deprived of eye-sight, and meditating suicide, must be incapable of bringing that precipice so accurately to the eye of the reader. But the impressions of the passions are various. We often perceive in real life, that sorrow seizes the mind with a calm force, which renders it collected, and able to dwell on the minutiae of every solemn object, which is presented to the sight or recollection.

Shakespear designed to represent the mind of Romeo in that state, when, on hearing of Juliet's funeral, after a short exclamation, he pauses, and in that pause takes his deathful resolution. He then sedately orders post-horses, enquires if there are any letters from the frier, and proceeds with that minute description of the apothecary's shop ;  
every

every circumstance of which, as it rises to his memory, gives added confirmation to the hope, that such extreme poverty would make the owner regardless of that law, which makes the sale of poison death in Mantua.

Milton, in his beautiful dramatic poem *Comus*, allowed to be a perfect work of its kind, makes the speeches of the two gentle brothers, benighted, and under much anxiety for the fate of their sister, abound with metaphor and allusion.

The Monthly Reviewer declares, that his objection to the dramatic parts of *Louisa* has not proceeded either from acrimony or fastidiousness; and there certainly is no reason for an ungenerous suspicion of such unworthy motives. The Monthly, and Critical Reviewers have been candid and liberal in their praise of Miss Seward's former writings. The censure in question has doubtless proceeded from the want of strict attention to the varied operation of the passions; which on minds, differently constructed, produce effects so different; and still more, perhaps, to that want of intimacy with the best *English* poets, that often betrays our public censors of verse into decisions, at once

once arbitrary and erroneous. Ingenious and respectable as the Critical and Monthly Reviewers in general are, yet have I frequently seen them attack a poem for expressions, considered by them as absurd, unprecedented and inadmissible, which were to be justified by the repeated usage of all our great poetic writers. Mr. Stevens's beautiful poem **RETIREMENT**, was one of the compositions so inconsiderately censured by the Critical Reviewers.

To criticise English verse justly, it is not sufficient that a man is a good classic in the learned languages, and conversant with the Italian and French poets. He ought to be perfectly acquainted with the works of Spenser, Shakespear, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Prior, Thomson, Young, Collins, Gray, and Shenstone (who was the most beautiful pastoral writer that our nation, or perhaps any other, has produced; as Gray was the most perfect master of the sublimer lyric style); together with the brilliant, and, in point of number, matchless collection of male and female writers, which forms the poetic galaxy of our modern hemisphere; and whose laurels have not yet taken root on their graves, the only soil in which they have a chance

to flourish unmolested. There they may perhaps flourish now *he* is gone, whose too potent hand, impelled by rival-hatred, and thirst of exclusive fame, tore, even from *that* sanctuary, those laurels which the just admiration of many generations had reared to maturity.

We might rationally suppose that the genius of Pope must have silenced, by its magnitude, the critics of his day ; but in reading his Letters, and the **TESTIMONIES OF AUTHORS**, which precede the Dunciad, we find the public censors of that period attacking his works on every hand, else we might wonder to hear him constantly speaking of professed critics with boundless contempt.

The Critical Reviewer does not complain of inferiority to the rest of Miss Seward's works in her *Louisa*, which her poetic friends consider as the chef d'œuvre of her compositions ; but this Reviewer censures the following passage as fanciful :

“ And on her blooming cheek the tresses bright,  
 “ That play'd in wavy wreaths of golden light,  
 “ Or on her snowy bosom shining fell !  
 “ Like a warm sun-beam on a lily's bell.”

If

If a simile is poetically beautiful, it is not necessary that it should be philosophically just. It is often more beautiful for being rather distantly allusive than exactly parallel. The best poetry frequently sports with slight and shadowy resemblances, which it is the province of a vivid imagination to bring together.

“ Her face was like an April morn  
“ Clad in a wint’ry cloud.”

Bright hair on the white bosom of a nymph, is at least as like a sun-beam on the bell of a lily, as the corpse of a beautiful woman (which is all the idea we can have of her ghost) is to a morning of April spread over with wintry clouds; and yet I had rather have been the author of those two lines in the old ballad, enriched with that simile, void as it is of precision, than have written many a long poem, which has not passed away without its praise.

The Critical Reviewer also dislikes the following passage in Louisa. Eugenio, alarmed by shrieks resounding from a neighbouring wood, thus describes his galloping into its recesses to explore the cause of them.

“ On

“ On fibrous oaks, that roughen all the ground;  
 “ My steed’s fleet hoofs with hollow noise resound ?  
 “ And doubled by the echos from the caves,  
 “ Appal a guilty band of desperate slaves.”

After quoting this passage, the Reviewer asks a wonderful question, *viz.* How a noise so loud as to frighten people could be produced by the galloping of an horse through a wood? Whoever has rode fast over the hardened roots of trees, which are perpetually found branching upon the surface of the earth in forests, will recollect how loud and hollow a noise is produced by the horse’s hoofs; and when the guilty business of the assailants is considered, and the effect of the echos, which conveyed the idea of more than a *single* approach, surely the above question must appear unaccountable!

It is with pleasure that I have uniformly perceived the editor of the Gentleman’s Magazine candid and ingenious in his criticisms; and I am glad to see that Miss Seward, in her third edition of Louisa, has ingenuously altered the line, whose harsh elision was objected to by that gentleman.

Those who are concerned in reputable publications, should take especial care of pronouncing rashly upon the works of established poetical writers, who must sedulously have studied the principles of their science, and who have probably followed Mr. Pope's example, in taking the opinions of their learned and ingenious friends upon every part of their work, before it goes to the press, experiencing the same respectful dread which *he* professed of laying before the public a work unworthy of its approbation.

F I N I S.



